

A Plea to My German Friends

Germany's collusion with Russia at the expense of Ukraine is a shameful betrayal of its postwar achievements

BY BERNARD-HENRI LÉVY

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Thousands of Americans on high alert not far from the Ukrainian frontline ...

The British prime minister is ready to call in land, air, naval support ...

France, while working to deescalate the crisis, announces she has sent a battalion to Romania ...

Sweden mobilizes against Russia's provocations, her warships in motion, her drones ...

Even if nothing is won yet—far from it!—it's the first good news of the year: The free world (and yes! we should not hesitate to say “the free world”!) reacts to the threat of an invasion of Ukraine—and Vladimir Putin, as expected, begins to retreat.

And yet, there remains one exception: Germany, Europe's premier power.

It's the brand new minister of foreign affairs, the Green Party's Analena Baerbock, who first dismisses the military option in Kyiv on Jan. 17, leaving it to her colleague in the Ministry of Defense, Christine Lambrecht, to announce a grotesque shipment of 5,000 protective helmets.

Then, a series of Social Democratic leaders, such as the governor of the state of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, who declare themselves "understanding of the feeling of menace" the Kremlin experiences in the face of NATO's growth.

Then the shocking story of Estonia deciding to send Kyiv 42 D-30 howitzers before Germany reminds it that those weapons once belonged to East Germany, and that Berlin therefore has grounds to prohibit the export.

And on to the admiral, Kay-Achim Schoenbach, chief of the German army, forced to resign after having taken up the language of Russia's most offensive propaganda: that a kind Putin is only asking for respect from his mean Ukrainian neighbors ...

Worse, here now resurfaces the debate over the infamous Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline, 1,230 kilometers long, dug under the Baltic Sea to feed Russian gas to Germany, and through her, to Europe.

Must all be reminded that this pipeline—which follows the same path as its twin, Nord Stream 1, now in service for 10 years—will provide neither cheaper nor better energy?

That the only tangible effect of this Pharaonic project, strangely coveted by every German administration of the past 20 years, will be to circumvent Poland and Ukraine, thus denying them—following the logical conclusion—of precious transit fees?

And must we repeat that for us Europeans, this adventure will end with us dependent on Russia, which could, in theory, at any moment, close the taps?

So, the debate returns. NATO proposes that Chancellor Olaf Scholz postpone the implementation of this absurd, useless gas pipeline—about which the Ukrainians plead, once again, that it would exist only to weaken them. And if Scholz eventually does come to terms, it will only be after having drowned the fish, procrastinated, complained that it's a “private project,” or letting his ministers say how they are loathe to let this emblem of German industrial and financial technology get “dragged into the conflict.”

Strange ...

The German allies, then, have muddled their hypotheses.

Some evoke the heritage (so long gone now!) of Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik*.

Others invoke an old German guilt, and a time when, as Paul Celan would say, “death was a master from Germany.” (But why wouldn't this guilt benefit the Ukrainians, too?)

A third group sees in this neo-pacifism the hint of an ideology, “change through commerce,” whose theorist was Samuel Pisar, in his *Les Armes de la Paix*, from 50 years ago. (Pisar, to complicate things further, was none other than the stepfather and mentor to U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken ...)

And here comes those who are distrustful, in principle, of Germany, with their terrible suspicions: Former Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, who initiated the cursed pipeline, and who, once it was completed, is

bought out by Gazprom ... the head of the project, Matthias Warnig, former Stasi officer who played on the same team as young Vladimir Putin ... without mentioning the three firms blacklisted by the U.S. government under suspicion of participating, on German soil, in the development of the chemical weapons Russia used to poison Alexei Navalny.

Given this confusion, German allies and friends, there's only one solution.

Rekindle the spirit of Konrad Adenauer, Walter Hallstein, Wilhelm Roepke, the anti-Nazi and anti-Stalin founding fathers of the European Union.

Remind yourselves of that wall of shame, crossed under machine-gun fire, and brought down by Rostropovitch's bow like the walls of Jericho by Joshua's trumpets—and then remember how you grandly consecrated those lost in the Shoah with ash-colored stelae in the heart of Berlin.

Do not forget that you are the country of Kant's categorical imperative, of Habermas' constitutional patriotism, and also, before that, of a light Nietzschean wisdom that rejected the weight of a certain German spirit sick with power, hopeless prosperity, and satisfied conscience.

And hear those who, as I do, permit themselves to urge you: friends of science and philology, disciples of Hölderlin and Novalis, heirs to Thomas Mann, Adorno, and the Countess Doenhoff, inhabitants of that Lorelei of thought and beauty which, as French poet Guillaume Apollinaire would have it, made all Europeans around her swoon—you deserve better than to serve as Putin's doormat.

Translated from the French by Matthew Fishbane.

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